

A Grounded Theory of Hmong Male College Students Gender Identity Development



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Abstract

Using a constructive grounded theory, the purpose of this study was to examine the process of Hmong male college students' gender identity development. We examined how Hmong male college students experience their male identity by using Edwards and Jones' (2009) grounded theory of college men's gender identity development framework. The grounded theory of college men's gender identity development theoretical model is structured around the metaphor of a mask (Edwards & Jones, 2009). In order to understand Hmong college men's conceptions of themselves as men, we recruited 10 Hmong college students to participate in interviews. The results of this study suggest that, over time, participants experienced a process of learning societal expectations, trying to meet the expectations of two different cultures, and finding a balance between both cultures and what it means to be a Hmong man.

Definitions

Grounded Theory: Qualitative methodology that seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in peoples' lives. Researchers engage in a process of data collection that is often described as inductive in nature, in that the researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove. Rather, issues of importance to participants emerge from the stories that they tell about an area of interest that they have in common with the researcher.

The Theory (Edwards & Jones, 2009)

Grounded Theory of College Men's Gender Identity

Development – Edwards and Jones's (2009) study offered a theoretical model structured around the metaphor of a mask. This theory includes three phases along with the social context and the transcending external expectations. The phases are:

- 1) Social Context: External Expectations of What It Means To Be a Man
- 2) Performing Masculinity According to External Expectations
 - a) Feeling a need to put on a mask
 - b) Wearing a mask
 - c) Experiencing and recognizing the consequences of wearing a mask
- 3) Beginning to Transcend External Expectations

Interview Questions

- How do you come to understand yourself as Hmong man through the Hmong culture?
- What are some of things you believe you have to do to be seen as a man by others?
- What are the consequences of behaving these ways for you and the important people in your life?
- Who is your role model? What is your relationship like with your father or other male figures in your life?

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Demographics of Population

CODE	AGE	YEAR IN COLLEGE	MAJOR	FIRST GENERATION	LIVE	FAMILY MEMBERS	SEXUAL ORIENTATION	MARITAL STATUS	BIRTH PLACE
HM 1	21	Senior	Communication Studies	Don't Know	Off Campus	7	Heterosexual	Single	Shoreview, MN
HM 2	21	Junior	English	Yes	Off Campus	8	Heterosexual	Single	St. Paul, MN
HM 3	19	Sophomore	Health Science & Entrepreneurship	Yes	On Campus	8	Heterosexual	Single	Minneapolis, MN
HM 4	21	Junior	Psychology	Yes	At Home	8	Heterosexual	Single	Thai Refugee Camps
HM 5	18	Freshman	Physiology	Yes	On Campus	8	Bisexual	Single	St. Paul, MN
HM 6	25	Graduate Student	Masters of Fine Arts	Yes	At Home	8	Heterosexual	Single	Thai Refugee Camps
HM 7	19	Freshman	Undecided	Yes	On Campus	9	Heterosexual	Single	Eau Claire, WI
HM 8	19	Freshman	Business & Marketing	Yes	On Campus	6	Heterosexual	Single	Minneapolis, MN
HM 9	19	Freshman	Undecided	Yes	On Campus	10	Heterosexual	Single	Merced, CA
HM 10	23	Senior	Kinesiology	Yes	At Home	8	Heterosexual	Single	St. Paul, MN

Results

A lot of the Hmong men experienced cultural clashes, including Hmong male roles versus Western male roles, independent versus collective expectations, and expectations regarding their sexual orientation.

- “In The Hmong culture, they believe you have to obey your parents. I didn't grow up believing in that. My parents scold me for that. I grew up around White people and their culture is very different from the American culture. So I had very different beliefs and that will always get me in trouble.”
- “Most of my cousins got married after high school, no one had a bachelor's degree so my mom predicted I wouldn't either. And I would grow up to be nothing. For me I took it differently and proved her differently.”
- “Real men don't cry.”

The majority of the participants felt there are more pressures in the Hmong culture versus the Western culture.

- “I am a representative of my father.”
- The traditional sense of the Hmong way, is to know how to hold a knife, cut meat – this is in the very traditional Hmong way. If you don't know these things you shouldn't get married. Based on religious stuff, especially for men knowing our very base traditional skills – like thanking people.”

Limitations and Suggestions

From birth to old age, Hmong men are more superior and highly valued than women. They are perceived to be the breadwinners, protectors, leaders, pillars of the family and the Hmong society. Yang (1997) argued Hmong men encounter many possible sources of stress as a result of their loss of fear, hopelessness, and despair. No other studies have taken up the focus of Hmong college men.

The Hmong college men in this study engaged in a process of gender identity development that centered on a complex interaction between them as individuals and varied societies' expectations of them as men. This study was conducted on a single campus with a small number of participants. Further research on how men can begin to surpass societies' expectations of them as men is deeply needed.

References

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